

BE PREPARED

Uma Anand



ISBN 978-81-237-0158-5

First Edition 1975

First Revised Edition 1989

Reprints 1993, 1997, 2003, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014,
2017, 2019 (*Saka* 1941)

© Uma Anand

₹ 35.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India

Nehru Bhawan, 5 Institutional Area, Phase-II

Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110 070

Website: www.nbtindia.gov.in



Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

BE PREPARED

Uma Anand

Illustrated by
Satyasewak Mukherjee





THE FRIENDS

A bell rang loud and clear. Before the sound had died several doors were flung open and groups of boys came out, chattering and laughing like birds freed from their cage.

Two boys met at the steps of the school. "Hullo, Navin. Thank goodness the exams are over," said the taller of the two, a jolly-looking youngster with a pleasant smile.

"Hullo, Kapil," replied Navin, a boy with a pale, serious face. "I suppose you're again going to a Camp during the vacations."

"No, not this year. I'm going to visit my uncle who lives near Simla. The Scout Master chose two other Patrols for the Camp this time. We have to take it in turns. I wish you'd take up Scouting, Navin, instead of studying all the time. It would make you tough and strong, too."

"I wish I could," replied Navin, "but you know it isn't possible. I have to help my father in the shop every evening."

Kapil did not say any more. But in the evening he asked his father, "Do you think Vijay Chacha would mind if Navin came with me to Tara?"

"Why not drop him a postcard and find out?" suggested Mr Kapur. Kapil did so and waited impatiently for the reply.

Three days later Kapil received a postcard from his uncle, who wrote:

Dear Kapil,

Your friend is very welcome. He can share the loft with you. I expect he too is a good Scout. The two of you could prepare for your Camper's Badge. Your cousin Rekha is now a full-fledged Guide. She is training for her Cookery Badge. Last night she gave us burnt potato *bhaji* and smoked pea *pulao* for dinner. Delicious! She threatens to continue cooking, so be prepared! Your aunt sends her love to your mother. Please give your parents my regards.

We'll expect you both on Sunday.

Your affectionate uncle,
Vijay Kapur

Kapil was excited and happy. "I'll go and ask Navin at once," he said to his mother.

Kapil enjoyed visiting Navin's shop in the heart of the Karnal bazaar. It always smelt of fresh grain and sweet biscuits and was full of people coming and going.

Today Navin was alone in the shop. "Why, Kapil, how nice of you to come," he said in surprise.

"Listen, Navin. I've just got an invitation for you."

"For me? From whom?" asked the astonished boy.

"I told you I was going to spend the vacations with my uncle. He's the P.T. Instructor and also the Assistant Scout Master of a school near Simla. He says I can take you with me. He thinks

you're a Scout too. Do you think your parents will let you go?"

"I hope they agree. I'd love to go. I've never been to a hill-station," said Navin. "Wait . . . I'll call Father."

To their surprise Navin's parents agreed to let him go. In fact, his father said to Kapil, "We've been worried about his health and the change will do him good. Please thank your uncle for us."

"We leave on Sunday morning by the six o'clock bus and will reach Tara by noon. Chacha's cottage is just a furlong up the hill from the Tara bus-station. My aunt keeps a cow and has a vegetable farm and I'm going to see to it that Navin gets strong and healthy," said Kapil.



CUBS AND SCOUTS

On Sunday just before six o'clock, the two friends met at the bus-station. Kapil had a neat haversack and a small suitcase with him. Navin was carrying several untidy bundles.

"Gosh, Navin. What on earth have you brought along?" asked Kapil as the boys got into the bus and heaved the bundles in and under their seats.

"Mother insisted," panted Navin, pulling up a large basket with an effort. "My clothes are in this small tin box but the other things are for your aunt. The basket is full of mangoes, the large tin has assorted biscuits and this is a bag of fresh *gur-sakkar*."

"Well, I'm sure we'll be glad to eat it all when we reach, so let's not grumble at having to carry it with us," said Kapil grinning happily.

Just then the conductor blew his whistle, the passengers scrambled in and the big bus began to move. When the boys had settled down, Navin said, "You told me your Vijay Chacha thinks I'm a Scout. I'm afraid he'll be disappointed. But tell me, what do you do as a Scout?"

"Well, I've been a Scout for two years now. I've passed my second class Scout tests which means I've learnt some first aid and

signalling apart from other things. But you know, Navin, I was a Cub before I became a Scout."

"A Cub? What's that?"

"Small boys are called Cubs. They form a Pack. I joined our school Pack when I was seven and when I was twelve I became a Scout. It was fun being a Cub. Actually, Lord Baden-Powell took the idea of the Cubs from the story of an Indian boy."



“Who was Lord Baden-Powell and what story are you talking about?”

“Lord Robert Baden-Powell was the Englishman who founded the Scout movement in 1907. He felt that boys like us, who live in cities, don’t know much about nature, or birds and animals. We feel helpless in a forest and aren’t able to look after ourselves. He wanted boys to learn to be independent, fearless and always willing to lend a hand. He felt that if boys learnt these things when still young, they would grow up to be useful citizens. Today there are Scouts in many countries of the world. The Scout movement is like an international brotherhood.

“As for the story, it was written by another Englishman, Rudyard Kipling, who lived in India for many years. He wrote a story called *The Jungle Book*. Have you read it?”

“No, but I’d like to. What’s it about?”

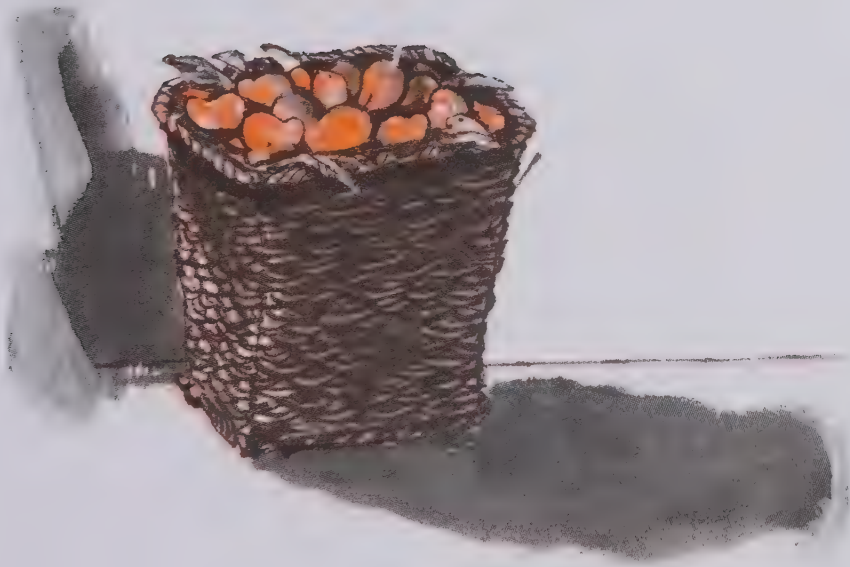
“I’m sure Vijay Chacha will have a copy, so you can read it. It’s about Mowgli, a village boy who was brought up by a family of wild wolves.”

“How did that happen?”

“Well, his parents had taken Mowgli into the jungle. He was just a small chap then. They were camping in the jungle. A tiger was on the prowl and when their fire burnt out, Sher Khan, the tiger pounced. But he stepped on the dying embers of the fire, burnt his paw and roared with pain. Mowgli’s parents woke up and in the confusion that followed Mowgli crawled into the jungle and was lost. A mother wolf found him and carried him off to her den, where he began playing with her cubs. He grew up with the wolves and learnt to hunt with the pack. He also learnt the language and signs of other animals and birds.”

“Who taught him these things?”

“His two friends Bhaloo, the wise old bear, and Bhageera, the clever panther. But you better read all about it when we get to Tara.”



BE PREPARED

Soon the bus came to a stop in the middle of a bazaar.

"Uchanna," shouted the conductor. Three people got off and the conductor blew his whistle.

"Stop, stop!" cried an old gentleman.

The driver turned around. "Hurry up, Sir," he called. "Get in."

The old gentleman got in followed by a rather fat lady and a small girl. The bus started with a lurch and the little girl stumbled and fell, grazing her knee on the edge of a seat. She began to cry loudly.

"Conductor! Conductor!" shouted the old gentleman. "Please stop the bus."

"I am sorry, Sir," said the conductor. "You'll have to wait till the next stop."

The little girl began to cry louder than ever. "Oh, dear," said her mother, "the cut is bleeding."

"Perhaps I can help," said Kapil, leaning across his seat.

"Navin, just pass me my haversack." Kapil opened the sack and took out a small bottle from a neatly-packed box. "I'll clean the cut, Ma'am," he said. "The bottle has spirit in it and might sting a bit. Could you hold her still a minute."



Kapil took out a bit of cotton wool and put some cleaning spirit on it. He quickly but firmly wiped the cut. The girl was about to cry when Kapil held up another little bottle. It was full of red liquid. "See," he said with a laugh. "I'm going to paint your knee a bright red to match your frock," and he put the red liquid all over the child's knee.

"Young man, how is it that you have these things with you? You're surely too young to be a medical student," asked the gentleman.

Kapil laughed. "I'm just fourteen, Sir, but I'm a Scout and our motto is BE PREPARED, so I always carry a first aid kit and a few tools with me on a journey."

"A Scout are you," said the old man. "Good. Good. Thank you."

Some time later, the bus came to a stop. "Kalka," called out the conductor.

The old gentleman, the fat lady and the little girl got off. The conductor told the remaining passengers that the bus would halt for twenty minutes and they could stretch their legs and eat something.

"Let's have some *alu-purees*, Navin," said Kapil as the boys got off the bus and made their way to a nearby shop.

THE FARM AT TARA

For Navin the journey from Kalka onwards was full of delightful surprises. The road wound steeply up in sweeping curves and round every bend new ranges appeared on the horizon. The mountains seemed to climb into the sky and although the sun shone brightly, a cold fresh breeze made him shiver slightly. The bushes and shrubs on the lower hills gave way to forests of tall dark trees and sudden bursts of flowers.

"What a beautiful forest!" he exclaimed.

"The tall dark trees are deodars. They have short needles instead of leaves," Kapil told him.

"And the red flowers? Are they roses?"

Kapil laughed. "No, of course not! They are rhododendrons. In May the forest looked as though on fire with these flowers. Now, in June, there are only a few left."

"I suppose you also learnt about trees and flowers in the Scout movement," asked Navin, half-teasingly.

"Yes, I did. I got my Nature Badge." Both boys burst out laughing. "Look!" said Kapil. "There's Tara. We've arrived. I'm sure they'll be waiting for us at the bus-station."

Sure enough, as the bus came to a halt, a high voice called,



"There he is. I can see him, Kapil bhai!" A young girl of about twelve, her two plaits swinging to her waist and her bright eyes shining, opened the door of the bus and swung herself up.

"Gosh Rekha! How tall you've grown!"

"But not as tall as you," she laughed. "Let me carry the basket."

"This is Navin. He has brought masses of bundles for Chachi. Where is Vijay Chacha?"

"Here I am," called a cheerful voice. "Stop chattering you two, let's first get the luggage out."

As they got off with all the bundles and boxes, the bus started on its way to Simla.

"Well, Kapil," said his uncle clapping him on the back, "you're looking fine. Almost as tall as I am."

"This is my friend, Navin, Chacha," said Kapil.

"Thank you for inviting me," said Navin shyly.

"You are very welcome," replied Vijay Chacha.

"Kapil, how did you do in your exams?"

"We-ell I'll pass, but Navin is sure to stand first as usual," said Kapil.

As they walked up the narrow hill path two children, about eight years old, came running down towards them.

"There are Ramu and Rani," Rekha laughed. "They'll insist on doing their 'good deed' for the day."

"What do you mean?" asked Navin.

"Aren't you a Scout?" Vijay Chacha asked with surprise.

"No Sir . . . er not yet . . ." stammered Navin.

Rekha interrupted, "Ramu is a Cub and his twin sister Rani, is a Bulbul. It's part of the Cub and Bulbul Promise to do at least one good deed a day. So the twins are always looking for ways of



being helpful. Their father, Mr Rao is in charge of the Tara railway station."

By this time the twins had reached the group. "Let me help! Let me carry a bundle, Uncle Vijay." "Give me the box, Rekha didi," they burst out breathlessly.

"Now, now. Just a minute. Where are your manners, Ramu? First say hullo to Kapil bhai," interrupted Vijay Chacha. "And this is his friend, Navin."

The children smiled at the boys. "Please let us help."

"Certainly," said Kapil. "Here. Carry this bag between the two of you. And be sure not to drop it."

The whole party moved on.

"Here we are, and welcome to Tara-Farm," said Vijay Chacha as he opened a red wicket-gate. A short stone-paved path led to a small house with a sloping red roof. Navin gave a gasp of delight. "Why, it's just like a fairy cottage!" he exclaimed.

"And our room is right up there, where the roof rises above the triangular window," said Kapil pointing to the loft.

"We'll take the bag to the loft," said Ramu as the twins entered the porch puffing and panting, finding their 'good deed' rather a heavy burden.

THE HANDYMAN

The twins insisted on giving the boys a guided tour of the farm. It was not large but was full of interesting things. Behind the house were the vegetable patches. On one side of the vegetables was a chicken-run which was enclosed with wire-mesh and had wooden frames. Inside were box-like hen-houses. The floor was neatly covered with a layer of fresh sawdust.

"We're allowed to help collect the eggs," announced the twins.

"I'm afraid the door is a bit shaky. I told Papa about it, but he has been so busy he must have forgotten," said Rekha, as she opened the wire-mesh door.

Kapil inspected the hinges. "Don't bother him. I can easily fix this. All it needs is a couple of new screws. I've my tool-kit with me."

Navin looked at his friend with admiration. There seemed no end to the things Kapil could do. No need to ask where he had learnt his carpentry. Navin was sure it was part of his Scout training.

"What's happened to the cow?" asked Kapil pointing to an empty shed behind the hen-house.

"The poor thing died last winter," said Rekha. "But we get

plenty of milk and butter from Jaswant's dairy."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Kapil. "I'm so glad Jaswant is here. He is an excellent Scout. Perhaps he will take Navin and me out camping for a night or two."



"I'm sure he'd like to. But now we must go in and have something to eat," said Rekha leading the way to the kitchen.

In the kitchen Navin saw that there was a low table on the side opposite the kitchen-stove and a plank like a bench had been fitted against the wood-panelled wall.

Rekha's mother served out the food and everyone carried their *thaal* and glass of *lassi* to the table. After a hearty meal Navin noticed with surprise that everyone took their own utensils to the sink and washed them in turn, leaving no 'extras' for Rekha's mother to deal with, except the two cooking pots. As he had never cleaned his *thaal* at home, he watched Kapil and then carefully cleaned and wiped his own *thaal*, placing the things upside-down on the rack above the sink as he had seen Kapil and Rekha do.

He looked up to see if Kapil was watching. "I'll soon learn," he said.

"Of course you will." Kapil put his arm across his friend's shoulder affectionately. "Come, we'll unpack our things and then we'll mend the door of the chicken-run."



THE SCOUT CAMP

“As it’s your first day here you must take it easy,” said Vijay Chacha later in the evening. “I think it would be best if we took a walk up to the Scout Camp. There are no young people there at present as this month they are holding an Instructor’s Course. But we can show Navin around.”

The boys, Rekha and Vijay Chacha walked up a narrow shady road through thick forest till they came suddenly upon an open *maidan*. Navin was surprised to see such a large, flat space. It was like a parade ground. At one end of the ground were several log-huts.

“This is where we came for our Scout Camp, Navin,” said Kapil. “Come along I’ll show you the dining-hut and the cabins.”

One of the huts was full of tables and small wooden stools. Each set was painted in bright colours—yellow or red or green or blue. They looked very gay. The sleeping cabins, to Navin’s surprise, had three tiers of bunks along the walls, like a railway coach.

“It must be great fun to live together,” he said to Kapil.

“Yes, I had a grand time here and made friends with boys who came from all parts of India.”

Two little round faces peeped in at the cabin door.

"Hullo, twins!" called Kapil. "Where have you sprung up from?"

"We want to show him the Pow-wow circle," said Ramu. Navin burst out laughing. "Bow-wow circle? What's that?" The twins giggled. "Not Bow-wow . . . but POW-WOW."



Vijay Chacha smiled. "The Pow-wow circle is where the Cubs hold their Pack meets. It's about 500 yards further on."

"Do take me to your POW-WOW circle, Ramu," said Navin. So with the twins hopping and skipping in front, they went on



till they came to another flat open space cut into the hillside. This was smaller than the big ground and round in shape. There were rough stone steps on the bank of the hillside leading down to it.

"It looks like a small open-air theatre," said Navin.

"So it is, in a way," explained Vijay Chacha. "On the last day of a Camp the boys put on a show here at the camp fire. They do folk dances, skits, sing songs and . . ."

"And Akela holds the Pow-wow meeting here too," said Ramu, determined to add his important news.

"Who is Akela?" asked Navin, always willing to learn.

"That reminds me, Chacha," said Kapil, "could you lend Navin *The Jungle Book*? Otherwise I'm afraid there'll be no end to his questions."

"Certainly. He must read it," said Vijay Chacha. "The leader of a Cub Pack is called Akela, after the leader of the wolf pack in *The Jungle Book*."

The sun began to set behind the hills. The clouds turned from gold to pink then to mauve and slowly faded. Navin thought he had never seen such a beautiful sight.

"This is a wonderful place," he said.

"The whole estate was gifted to the Boy Scouts' Association many years ago by an old gentleman when he retired and left India. Before that some Indian leaders had started a purely Indian Scout movement called the Hindustan Scouts. In 1947 after we got our independence the two groups united to form the Bharat Scouts and Guides of India. Come on, we must start for home now."

Dusk fell rapidly and soon it was dark. "Look at the lights of Simla," said Kapil as they returned home.

The hill opposite glowed with thousands of lights.

"Now look up," said Vijay Chacha.

Millions of stars seemed to hang right above Navin's head.

"How big and bright they seem. We never see such bright stars in Karnal," he said.

"Kapil, point out the North Pole Star to Navin," said his uncle. "And you must teach him to find it for himself."

So Navin learnt to use the starry sky as a night compass by first identifying the Great Bear constellation and then using its Pointers and following the line to the fixed point of the Pole Star.

That night as he was about to drop off to sleep, Navin said to his friend, "I am so happy to be here, Kapil."

"I am very glad you're enjoying yourself. Now you better go to sleep. I've promised Chachi that we'll help clean out the chicken-run first thing in the morning."



THE ERRAND

"Tap, tap."

Navin woke up.

"Tap, tap, tap."

"Kapil. Someone is knocking," he said. He looked across at his friend's bed but Kapil's bed was empty, the bed clothes neatly turned down to air. Navin jumped out of bed and turned his bed clothes down in the same way.

Kapil came in, dressed and ready. "Had a good sleep?" he called.

"Tap, tap. Tap, tap."

"Listen, Kapil. Who is tapping?"

"That must be the pied woodpecker. He lives in the old silver oak just behind the house. Get ready and we'll see him on our way to the chicken-run."

A few minutes later the boys stood under a shady tree. "Where is he?" asked Navin.

"Shsh. Don't make a noise or he'll fly away," warned Kapil.

"Tap, tap. Tap, tap."

"Look, there he is," whispered Kapil, pointing.

Navin looked carefully. "Tap, tap," went the woodpecker.



Navin saw a speckled white-and-black bird with a bright red head hopping along the trunk of the tree, pecking vigorously with his pointed beak. "What is he doing?" he asked.

· "Searching for grubs that live in the trunk of the tree."

"How can he walk up the trunk like that?" Navin was very amused by the funny little bird.

"He supports himself on his stumpy tail. But let's be off now."

From the cowshed Kapil brought out a red wheel-barrow and a long-handled broom. "You hold the barrow," he instructed, "and I'll sweep the sawdust to the door. We must dump the sawdust in the garden pit, and then lay a fresh lot on the floor."

As they got busy, Chachi appeared with a basket of chicken-feed.

"It is good of you to help." She began filling the feed-troughs. "Chuck, chuck chuck," she called.

Out from their boxes hopped the hens, running helter-skelter for the feed-troughs. Kapil emptied out the water-pots and Navin helped to refill them.

"Kapil," called Vijay Chacha, "could you do me a favour?"

"Certainly, Chacha."

"I have to go up to Simla for some work. But I'd promised Mr Vyas at the Sheep Farm that I'd take up his weekly supply of vegetables. If you and Navin could deliver them to him it would be a great help."

"We would love to, Chacha. I'm longing to take Navin into the hills. The Sheep Farm is just a couple of miles beyond the Scout Camp," he explained, turning to his friend.

Before leaving, Kapil packed a food-box and flask in his haversack and Navin saw that he also put in a penknife, and a notebook. Then they both set off with a bag of vegetables each.

It took them a good two hours to get to the Sheep Farm.

"There's Mr Vyas," said Kapil and waved to a thin man who was inspecting a big woolly sheep that lay on its side.

"My uncle has sent you the vegetables, Mr Vyas," Kapil said.

"Thank you. This poor animal has hurt her foot," said Mr Vyas.

"You seem to be very busy, so we'll leave now," said Kapil, as he put the bags into a store-room.

LOST AND FOUND

The walk had made them hungry. Kapil chose a pretty spot where they sat down and ate their lunch. After finishing the food Kapil said, "Should we try a game of 'Track the Hunter'?"

"How do you play it?" asked Navin.

"Go and hide in the forest. I'll give you five minutes. Then I'll set off to find you by the signs you've left."

"I shan't leave any signs," said Navin.

"That's what you think," replied his friend. "But a Scout is trained to notice all sorts of 'give-away' clues. When I find you I'll explain the signs by which I tracked you down."

Navin ran off. He had seen some large rocks jutting out on the side of the hill. He made his way to the rocks and in order to get under them he pushed through some thick bushes which provided an excellent screen. He crept under the rocks and crouched down.

In the meantime Kapil had barely had the patience to wait five minutes when he decided to begin tracking. To Navin's complete surprise a face peered over the bushes and Kapil laughed, "Caught you!"

"How did you find me so soon?" asked Navin, very crest-fallen,

as he came out from his hiding place.

“Look, I’ll show you the clues you left behind. First I knew the direction you took because you suppressed a cough as you went round the hill. Then, you can see a clear footprint on that damp earth. You should have stepped only on dry ground. And as for



these bushes—look how you pushed your way through. The branches are twisted and twigs broken; there is a definite gap.”

“Yes, I can see I left all the clues I could have,” said Navin. “Now it’s your turn. I wonder if I’ll turn out a better detective!” Navin waited very quietly, hoping to hear a sound which would indicate the direction Kapil had taken. But all he could hear was the whispering of the wind and the cawing of rooks. When the five minutes were over he was quite baffled. He set off, at random, in the direction opposite to the one he had taken in his turn. He tried to look for footprints, or broken branches, but with no luck.

Suddenly his eye caught a slight movement in the bushes near him. He froze. Was it a snake? Then he heard a soft whimpering cry.

The next minute, forgetting all about the tracking game, Navin shouted at the top of his voice, “Kapil, Kapil, Kapil!”

The sudden yell, in a tone of urgent appeal, alarmed Kapil who was actually crouching behind a clump of half-grown pines barely ten yards from Navin’s starting point. He sprang up and ran towards the sound of the cry. Now what could have happened to that city greenhorn?

He came upon Navin lying on his stomach between two rocks intently looking at a spot under some bushes.

“Navin, are you all right?” he panted.

“Kapil, come here. Look I daren’t touch it. Listen.”

Kapil heard a whimper. He knelt down and looked. A tiny puppy, half-dead with fright, pain and exhaustion lay in a ditch under the bush, its front paw caught in a trap.

“Gosh! Poor little chap. Wait, Navin, I’ll lift the trap—I know these wretched things. Poachers set them to catch rabbits.”

The puppy squealed feebly. The boys managed to lift it out of the ditch, along with the trap. Kapil released the catch and took the little paw out. It hung limply in his hand.

"I'm afraid it might be broken. He's young. The bone can heal. But he may have been here for days. Look how thin he is. He's starving."

"What a cruel thing this is," said Navin, pushing away the trap.

"Don't throw it away, Navin. We must report this. We'd better take the pup home quickly," said Kapil.



CHHOTA BHALOO

The boys reached home as Vijay Chacha turned into the gate.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

The boys told him their story. He took the trap from Navin. "This is bad. I'll take it down to the Police *Chowki* and make a report. Your Chachi will help bandage the poor little pup's paw."

While Chachi was fussing over the pup, Rekha came in. Navin repeated the whole story to her. Rekha fell in love with the little pup. "Can we keep him? Do let's. Since Bhaloo died we haven't had a dog. He has exactly the same colouring as Bhaloo—brown, with a black muzzle. Let's call him Chhota Bhaloo."

"We must first see whether we can keep him alive. He is starved and very weak."

"I'll nurse him," said the girl eagerly. "Wait, let me make a cosy bed for him. Will you help me, Navin?"

She ran out to the shed with Navin close behind her. They found an empty, round basket. Navin cleaned and dusted it and Rekha first lined it with straw then put some soft rags in it. The puppy was put in the basket.

Ramu and Rani ran in. Rani had a large scrapbook in her hand. "I've brought you my wild flower collection," she said to Kapil.

"First look at what we have to show you," he replied, showing them the pup.

"I wonder how we can feed him," said Chachi. "He's too weak to drink from a bowl and I don't have a feeding bottle."

"Would my dolly's little bottle do?" asked Rani.

"Excellent idea," said Kapil. So the twins ran off to get the bottle. It was just the right size for the pup and Rekha taught him to suck the milk through the nipple.



“Do you realize, Navin, that you’ve passed another Scout test today?” Kapil remarked to his friend.

“What do you mean?” asked Navin puzzled.

“‘A Scout is a friend to all animals’,” quoted Kapil.

“Cubs, too, Kapil bhai,” put in Ramu.

“And Bulbuls and Guides as well,” put in Rani not wanting to be left out.

In the meantime, no longer hungry or in pain, Chhota Bhaloo curled up in his basket and fell fast asleep.



NIGHT ALARM

The events of the day had been exciting and Navin found it difficult to drop off to sleep. He had begun reading *The Jungle Book* but when Kapil fell asleep he did not want to keep the light on so he went and stood near the window and tried to locate the particular stars Kapil had taught him the names of.

In the distance a jackal began to howl and the eerie sound carried far into the silent night. Navin's gaze was caught by a thin spiral of smoke that rose from the bushes below the Scout Camp.

Suddenly he saw a shower of flaming sparks shoot up and then come down like so many falling stars. Another bush, further up, burst into flame. Again the jackal howled.

Navin felt uneasy. Was this the beginning of one of those dreaded forest-fires Kapil had warned him about? Should he wake up his friend? Or was he being silly?

Not wanting to take a chance he shook Kapil's shoulder gently and whispered, "Kapil, Kapil. Wake up!"

"What is it?" mumbled Kapil sleepily.

"I'm not sure. But it may be a forest-fire," said Navin.

In a trice Kapil leapt from his bed and looked out. "Yes. Looks like it. Put on something warm. Where is the torch? Come down.

I'll wake up Chacha." While he was still speaking, Kapil put on a pullover, picked up the torch, wore his shoes and ran downstairs.

By the time Navin went down, Vijay Chacha was up.

"Come on, boys," said Vijay Chacha.

Just then they heard the distant clanging of a gong. The distress signal of the night alarm rang out repeatedly across the hills.

As they ran up the path they were joined by several other men, some carrying buckets or torches.



By the time they reached the scene of the fire, it had spread rapidly. Navin saw that a number of people had formed a line and buckets were being passed quickly from one to the other. An old white-haired gentleman was supervising the fire-fighting. Vijay Chacha, Kapil and Navin joined the bucket-line. The water-hose could not reach the burning patches.

The old gentleman said, "We need to start a counter fire. Jaswant, bring volunteers."

"Coming," called a strong voice.

Navin saw a tall young Sikh run forward followed by two or three others. They ran up the hill and to Navin's surprise began to set fire to a whole line of bushes nearby. "Kapil, what are they doing?" he asked.

"The two fires will meet just below the line of the trees. Fire kills fire, Navin. That is Jaswant my friend."

A line of men were now walking along the lower edge of the fire, beating the bushes with sticks. They stamped on the bushes that had been drenched with water, to see that no embers were left that might rekindle.

The two bush fires met, blazed up, and then, to Navin's amazement, died down.

"More men needed for sand dumping," called Jaswant.

"Come on, Navin," said Kapil. Both boys ran up to Jaswant, glad of a change of work.

"Hullo Kapil," said Jaswant. "I heard you were here. What a way to meet. No chance to chat now. Give us a helping hand at the filling point."

There was a sand pit at one end of the big parade ground. The friends began shovelling sand into the fire as fast as they could.

Shortly afterwards Vijay Chacha came up to the boys. "We've done our bit. The Simla fire-brigade has arrived. Jaswant, why not join us at the farm for some well earned tea?"

Weary, but with the satisfaction of having done a good job of work, they made their way back to the farm. As they eagerly sipped some hot tea in large mugs Kapil said to Jaswant, "I was hoping that you'd take us up to the Shepherd's Hut for a couple of nights' camping."

"I'd love to," said Jaswant. "The three of us can go over the week-end. But tomorrow I'm going with a Scout Troop to help at the Chandpur cattle *mela*. They are short of volunteers. Could you come with me, Kapil?"

So it was decided that the two Scouts, Jaswant and Kapil, would go with the Scout Volunteers Patrol the next morning.



THE CHANDPUR FAIR

The village of Chandpur was about fifty miles below Tara on a diversion off the main Kalka road. Here, every year, a three-day fair was held. A small temple to goddess Chandidevi stood on top of a little hill with a water-tank in front of it. Farmers from the villages in the surrounding hills came to the fair to sell or buy cattle and to do *puja* before the Devi.

Jaswant and Kapil joined the Simla Scout Troop the next morning and drove in a bus to Chandpur.

At Chandpur the *maidan* below the temple was already crowded with people and cattle. The Scouts were soon allotted their duties. Jaswant's group had to help build a fenced-in area where all the cattle would be kept. Kapil was put on duty at the medical post where a doctor was vaccinating children and looking after the sick. Kapil found the children quite brave but their mothers very nervous and needing reassurance that the doctor would not harm their children.

Many old people had come to the *mela*. They were pilgrims come to pray to Chandidevi. Kapil was returning to the Scout Camp when he saw an old woman struggling up the steep steps that led to the temple. He was tired after a whole day's work at

the medical post and was longing for a mug of tea. But he realized that the old woman was in need of help.

“Mataji, let me help you,” he said.

“Thank you, son,” answered the old lady, as she gratefully clung to his arm.



Many people were bathing in the tank in front of the temple. Kapil saw that a Scout, Hari, was on duty at the tank. He was helping a very old man out of the water when a sudden shout and a sharp cry attracted his attention. Splash! A little boy had fallen in.

In a flash Hari slipped off his *chappals* and dived into the water. The boy came up once and then went under. Hari swam underwater till he was below the child. He came up floating on his back, the child firmly held under the arms. Kapil quickly ran to the steps and as Hari brought the boy along the steps, he knelt down and lifted the boy out. He lay him on the ground on his stomach and, kneeling astride him, began massaging his back in a rhythmic manner as he had been taught in the life-saver's test.

Hari, dripping wet, asked Kapil, "How is he doing?"

"He'll be fine. He didn't swallow much," replied Kapil. The little boy gave a gasp, brought up some water and began crying. "You better change those wet clothes, Hari," Kapil added.

"I'll inform the doctor on my way down," said Hari pushing past the excited and anxious people who were crowding round. "Give the child room to breathe," he told them. "Don't crowd so close."

The little boy was now recovering fast. "Whose child is he?" Kapil asked the crowd.

"He is my brother, bhai sahib," said a teenaged shepherd lad.

"You should look after him better," said Kapil gravely.

The doctor arrived with a blanket and some hot milk for the boy. "You two Scouts have done an excellent job. He'll be fine now."

Jaswant was waiting for Kapil at the Scout tent. "What have

you been doing, Jaswant?" Kapil asked.

"Kumar and I have been out searching for a lost calf. What a chase that wretched little bull gave us," said Jaswant laughing merrily.

"When I was on duty at Karnal during the Inter-State Sports Meet, our Scout duties were so different," said Kapil thoughtfully. "We helped old people cross the road, assisted others catch the right buses, checked tickets at the gate and ushered people to their seats!"

"Yes," said Jaswant. "City and village problems are very different. I like these people. They are so friendly and though they



lead a hard life they always seem so cheerful. Listen to them singing.”

Across the *maidan* a *pahari* folk song could be heard. Little fires glowed as women cooked their simple meals.

“I wish Navin were here,” said Kapil.

“We’ll take him out camping to the Shepherd’s Hut. Next year he can become a regular Scout,” replied Jaswant as they turned in for the night.

While Kapil was away Navin had been very busy preparing for the week-end camping expedition.

Every morning after breakfast he would start off with a pack on his back to practise walking with all the things they would need. This included a haversack with a change of clothes, the rolled up sleeping bag which was very light but very warm, plus a small supply of rations. The Scout test included cooking one’s own meal.

Kapil and Jaswant returned by tea-time. The evening was spent recounting the exciting tales of the cattle fair and planning for the coming week-end.

THE PICNIC

“Tap, tap! Tap, tap!”

Dawn was breaking on Saturday morning. Kapil and Navin woke to the sound of the busy pied woodpecker. They leapt out of bed and began getting ready.

“Come on down, boys,” called Vijay Chacha. “Jaswant is here.”

Jaswant was in the kitchen playing with Chhota Bhaloo. His haversack and kit were neatly packed and he also had a large water bottle. Navin noticed that he was carrying a coil of rope and a short-handled axe.

“You must take a hurricane-lantern, boys,” said Vijay Chacha, “and see that it has oil in it.”

Navin was glad he had practised walking with the camp-kit on his back. He found he could keep up fairly well with Jaswant and Kapil.

“Do you know how to lay out and light a fire, Navin?” asked Jaswant.

“I’ve never done it before,” said Navin.

“Then tonight I’ll give you your first lesson. To pass the Scout test you have to light a fire with only two matches. But first we’ll

have to chop wood. That's what I've brought the small axe for," explained Jaswant.

"We must be very careful about putting out the fire," said Kapil. "That dreadful forest-fire probably started from a carelessly thrown match or a picnic fire that wasn't thoroughly stamped out."

"Of course we'll be very careful," said Navin.



THE SHEPHERD'S HUT

The sun played hide-and-seek among the clouds. As evening drew on the sky glowed orange and gold.

The three boys started for the Shepherd's Hut by a steep, stony path that went through dense forest. Luckily the way was not long and Navin found that they had soon climbed up to the top of the hill, where to his surprise there was a flat open plateau with a few trees on one side and some clumps of bushes dotted around. The Shepherd's Hut was in the middle of the plateau. It was a small, simple, one-roomed hut made of logs. The floor was of straw-plastered mud.

"Some sheep have been in here," said Kapil. "It's dirty."

"Make a broom and sweep it clean. I'm going to get wood for our fire. We must hurry. The sun is sinking fast." With these words Jaswant picked up his rope and axe and ran off.

Kapil and Navin broke some twigs and tied them together to make a broom. They swept the hut and Navin spread out their sleeping bags while Kapil found three flat stones. He placed the stones together to form a fire-place.

Jaswant came up carrying a load of fire-wood and dried cones. He cut away the grass and cleared a space in front of the hut.

“Navin, I’m going to make a bonfire. Come and watch,” he called.

Navin saw that Jaswant first piled the dried cones in a heap, then he surrounded them with thin twigs. He put the bigger logs on top, forming a sort of ‘wigwam’.



"The cones and twigs are the kindling. They light easily but burn out quickly. The logs take time to catch fire but they burn longer," said Jaswant. "What should we cook tonight?"

"We have some left-over *parathas*," said Kapil. "What about roasting some large potatoes in the ashes of the fire? They taste delicious."

"Fine," said Navin. He had brought a cooking pot. Kapil dug a shallow hollow under the stones and transferred some of the burning sticks from the bonfire to the fire-place. Navin began his cooking.

In the meantime Jaswant's bonfire was crackling merrily and he put three large potatoes among the ashes.

"How are the potatoes doing?" asked Kapil. "They smell good."

The boys had a tin plate each. They helped themselves to the food. The hot, baked potatoes were delicious and filling. After they had eaten, the boys cleaned the pots with ash.

Then, to Navin's surprise, Jaswant took out a small mouth-organ from his pocket and began playing. He played a lilting *pahari* tune and then some merry Scout songs, followed by popular hits from recent films. Kapil and Navin sang the songs whenever they could remember the words.

"Navin looks sleepy!" said Kapil.

"We'd better all go to sleep," said Jaswant. "Let me put out the bonfire."

Navin went towards the hut. At the door he stopped, yelled, "Ow!" and fell over backwards. A thin, long shape leapt over him and scampered past Kapil who cried, "Watch out!" It bumped into Jaswant and fled across the plateau.

"What was that?"

"A panther!" cried Navin.

"A fox!" shouted Kapil.

"I think it was only a jackal," said Jaswant. The three boys burst out laughing. In the forest a jackal howled.

"Goodnight, friend," called Kapil. "You certainly gave us a fright."

"He must have gone into the hut to hunt for scraps while we were singing," said Jaswant, as the boys got into their sleeping bags. "Sleep well," he added. There was no reply. Kapil and Navin were already asleep.



ADVENTURE AT MIDNIGHT

Around midnight Navin woke with a start. What had awakened him? The hut was pitch dark. All was quiet. Jaswant and Kapil were sleeping soundly.

Navin sat up. Not a sound could be heard; nothing stirred. "Must have been a bad dream," he thought.

He was about to lie down again when faint, but unmistakable, came a cry, "Aa-aa-ow!" It was a thin high sound. Was it a voice, or an animal call he could not recognize?

"Jaswant! Kapil! Wake up. Someone is calling," Navin spoke urgently.

"What is it?" Jaswant was up at once. "Navin, why are you standing in the cold? Wear a pullover."

"Listen, Jaswant."

"Aa-aa-ow!" the cry rose high. It sounded desperate.

"Wait. Let me light the lamp." Jaswant lit the lantern.

"What's up?" asked Kapil sleepily.

"Someone's calling for help," said Jaswant. "Put on something warm, boys. Torch! Rope. Axe." As he spoke Jaswant began collecting things. Kapil jumped up. "I also have a torch. Navin, the first aid kit is in my haversack."

“Aa-aa-ow! Aa-aa-ow!” came the call again.

A few minutes later the boys set off. Navin carried the lantern.

“Wait. We must be sure of the direction,” said Jaswant.

“Aa-aa-ow!” came the cry. It seemed to come from the far end of the plateau. They started towards it. The moon shone brightly now and they could see fairly well. They arrived at the edge of the hill. Here the flat ground gave way to a steep fall. A few bushes grew at the edge. There seemed to be nothing else there.

“Ho! Who is there? Where are you?” called Jaswant.

“Aa-aa-ow. Down here!” shouted a voice. Jaswant lay on his stomach and crawled to the very edge of the hill. He shone his torch down. Kapil lay next to him and also shone his torch.



"Look, Jaswant. There, on that ledge. It's a boy," said Kapil.

The beams of light shone down on a rocky ledge that jutted out of the hillside about fifteen feet below the top. A young shepherd lad was crouched against the rock. He held something in his arms.

"Hold on. Don't worry," said Jaswant. "We'll soon bring you up."

"What have you got with you?" asked Kapil.

"It's a sheep. Please help me." The boy was in tears.

Jaswant unwound the rope. "Boy," he called, "is there enough room on the rock for another person?"

"Very little room," replied the boy.

"Jaswant, let me go down," offered Kapil. "It'll be easier for you to hold the rope."

"All right. I'll tie the rope round your waist. Navin, you hold the lantern over the edge. Remember Kapil, hold onto the rope with both hands and carefully place your feet against the hillside. I'll lower the rope very slowly."

"You'd better take your shoes off," suggested Navin.

THE RESCUE

The wind blew fairly strongly and the moon was covered by clouds. Kapil held the edge of the hillside and lowered himself. There were a few stones and scrubs where he could place his feet. He held the rope firmly and, with full confidence in Jaswant, said, "Fine. I can go." Jaswant lowered the rope very slowly, holding it with both hands.

"All right, Kapil?" asked Jaswant.

"Just another three feet I think," he replied. "Good. I am down."

Kapil found that the boy was about ten years old. "Aren't you Mr Vyas' servant Jai Dev's son?" he asked.

"Yes. I am Dhanu. My father will beat me if I lose the sheep. I've been here for hours." The boy was almost weeping.

"Don't cry, Dhanu. You're safe now and so is your sheep," said Kapil kindly. But a minute later he called out, "Jaswant. You can't haul him up. He's hurt his arm."

"What? Broken?"

"It's his shoulder."

"Don't touch it. Wait, let me think," said Jaswant.

Then he said, "Listen carefully, Kapil. Is the sheep very big?"

"No. Just half-grown."

"Have you got your cord with you?"

"Yes."

"And your penknife?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you could tie the lamb's hind legs together and then his fore legs in the same way?"

"I'll try," said Kapil. He took out his penknife and measured out some cord.

The lamb was too frightened to object to being tied up and Dhanu helped to hold him.

"Done," called Kapil.

"Now, put the lamb across your shoulders as the shepherds carry them," ordered Jaswant.

The lamb was fairly heavy and Kapil found it quite difficult to get him onto his shoulders without falling off the ledge.

"Now. Listen carefully. Have you got more cord or your scarf? You have to tie the fore and hind legs together across your chest as tightly as possible."

"Dhanu has a small turban," called out Kapil.

"Ask him to give it to you." Kapil took Dhanu's turban and first knotted it round the lamb's hind legs and then tied them firmly to the fore legs. The lamb was now wound round his neck like a muffler.

"Ready," he called.

"Now hold onto the rope and I'll pull you up. Come up slowly—don't look down," instructed Jaswant. The haul up was more difficult than the climb down. Jaswant's hands became raw with the strain of pulling the rope.

At last, to Navin's relief, the top of Kapil's head appeared above the cliff edge. Eagerly he helped to pull the boy over the top. Kapil was almost choking as Jaswant got the lamb off his shoulders.

"Thank God!" said Kapil. "In another few minutes that silly lamb would have strangled me! He rubbed his neck with his hands. "But how will we get Dhanu up, Jaswant?"

"Look," said Jaswant, "I've tied the other end of the rope round this tree-stump. It's quite strong and the knot won't give way. Dhanu!" he called. "I'm going to let down a rope. When it reaches you hold onto the end."



"Yes," replied the boy. Jaswant lowered the rope. "I've caught it," called Dhanu.

"All right. Now let go of the rope. I'm coming to fetch you. Kapil, give me Dhanu's turban."

Jaswant kicked off his shoes, lowered himself over the edge and began climbing down the rope, hand over hand, his feet against the hillside.

Kapil and Navin held the lamb, the torches and their breath.

Suddenly Jaswant lost his foothold and swung out dangling from the rope. The rope strained.

"Take the lamb, Navin," gasped Kapil, holding onto the rope with both hands to lessen the strain on the tree - stump. Jaswant swung towards the hill and dug in his foot. He began climbing down again.

Soon Jaswant joined Dhanu on the ledge.

"You're a very brave boy, Dhanu," he told the shepherd lad. "Now, I want you to be still braver. Climb onto my back. Put your unhurt arm round my waist and hold tight. That's right. Now cross your legs round me. Tighter. Fine. I'll tie you onto myself." Jaswant wound the turban round Dhanu and tied it round himself in front.

"This will hurt, Dhanu," he warned. "But you mustn't let go."

"I'll hold on tight," promised the weary lad.

Jaswant began the climb. He carefully dug one foot in at a time and pulled himself up, hand over hand. With the boy on his back it was not easy going. Although Dhanu was light he was almost too much for the young Scout to bear. He knew Dhanu must be in great pain but the boy did not utter a sound.

Bit by bit Jaswant climbed up, till at last he was level with the

top edge. "Come on boys. Heave, ho!" he called. They all made a tremendous effort. Jaswant came over, flop on his stomach, and both Kapil and Navin fell over in a heap. The lamb began bleating.

They made their way to the Shepherd's Hut. The first birds had begun to chirp. As Jaswant put Dhanu down inside the hut, he said to Navin, "The boy must be starving."

Navin filled a mug with warm milk and handed it to the tired and hungry child.



Jaswant took out a pullover from his haversack. Dhanu only had a thin cotton shirt on. His pyjamas were torn. Jaswant first put Dhanu's arm in a loose sling, then he put the pullover on him. It was so loose for Dhanu that it reached below his knees. The lamb again started bleating. Kapil untied its legs and Navin gave it the remains of the milk.

Dhanu drank the milk and smiled at the boys. Then he slumped on top of Kapil's sleeping bag in a deep sleep.

All the birds were awake now and a loud chorus of chirps and calls rose in the air. It was the beginning of a beautiful day.



HOME COMING

A couple of hours later they woke up Dhanu and set off. On the way Dhanu told them his story.

"I had come with the shepherd Nathu Ram, and the sheep for grazing. When we got back to the farm I saw that this lamb was missing. Once before a sheep had been lost and Mr Vyas had been very cross. So this time I didn't tell Nathu but ran back to look for the lamb. I heard it call. It had got down to that rock but couldn't get back."

"But how did you get down that steep hillside?" asked Kapil.

"I don't know. I was so frightened that my father would beat me that I couldn't leave the lamb. I got down somehow but couldn't climb up. It became dark and I was frightened."

In the distance they saw Jai Dev and Nathu armed with poles going up the hill. When they caught sight of the group they called out, "Thank God you've found the boy. We've been so worried."

Dhanu said, "They saved my life, Papa, and also the lamb."

"You naughty boy . . ." began Jai Dev, but Jaswant broke in, "You mustn't scold him. Your son is very brave. He has hurt his arm. We must get him to a doctor."

At the farm Mr Vyas was anxiously waiting for news. He

arranged for Dhanu to be taken immediately to a hospital in Simla.

“What a good thing you are Scouts. Your Scout training saved the life of a boy,” said Mr Vyas. “I know your uncle will be very proud of all of you, Kapil.”

Shortly afterwards they all went down to Tara-Farm.



A SALUTE

In the evening the family gathered on the lawn. The twins were teaching Navin the difference between a reef-knot and an ordinary knot. Jaswant and Kapil were trying to answer Rekha's questions about the rescue and the outing.

"I like the bit about the jackal jumping over Navin best," laughed Rekha.

"You should have seen his face," said Kapil.

"You know, Navin," said Vijay Chacha, "this holiday has been the best introduction you could have had to Scouting. You've seen for yourself how useful in real life are the many things Scouting teaches."

"I realize that," said Navin. "I know about birds and trees . . ."

". . . and animals," put in Rani, "and wild flowers."

"Quite right, Rani," said Navin. "In fact, I've learnt to look at the world around me with new eyes."

"And the sky above you, too," added Kapil.

"I saw that Jaswant knew the type of knot that would hold round the tree and the different one round Kapil's waist. I saw Kapil use his first aid kit, and how useful it is to know carpentry and to lay a fire or chop wood . . ."

“Or wash plates,” said Rekha.

“To say nothing of cooking, fire-fighting or rescuing lost shepherd lads.”

“That reminds me,” said Vijay Chacha, “Dhanu is much better. They’ve put his arm in plaster. It’s a simple fracture and it’ll mend easily. He sent you boys his love and thanks for all you did for him.”

“Navin, I hope you’ll join our Scout Troop this term,” said Kapil.

“Do you think I’ll be accepted?” asked Navin.

“You’ve already learnt a lot,” said Vijay Chacha. “You’re just the type who’d make an excellent Scout.”

“I hope to qualify as a Rover next year when I am seventeen,” said Jaswant.

In the meantime Rekha had run into the house. She came out carrying a big dish. “And I hope to get my Guide’s Cookery Badge. Look! I’ve a surprise for you.” And she opened the dish. Inside it was heaped hot *halwa* with the words made out with peanuts:

*A Salute to Our Scouts,
Jaswant, Kapil, Navin.*





NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

₹ 35.00

ISBN 812370158-6



9 788123 701585

19200851

